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Animal Models in Drug Development

SAMIR N. KHLEIF AND GREGORY A. CURT

Introduction

The process of cancer drug discovery may begin with either empiric screening or rational drug design. In either case, the necessary steps in drug development that follow the identification of an interesting lead require appropriate animal model systems. Just as screening systems and rational drug design have benefited from recent advances in cell culture technique and molecular biology, so too has the role of animal model systems in drug development. Beyond simply predicting dose-limiting toxicity, drug metabolism or tissue and compartment distribution, animal models are increasingly being used to guide dose escalation in Phase I trials and provide tumor microenvironments that mimic the clinical situation.

The processes of cancer drug discovery and drug development have evolved, and will continue to change, since the first successful use of drugs to treat systemic cancer more than 50 years ago. Basic research in cancer biology has provided new targets for cancer drug development and brought older targets into sharper focus. Of the properties that make a cell malignant (uncontrolled growth, metastasis, dedifferentiation, genetic plasticity, and drug resistance), only uncontrolled growth has been exploited as a target for cancer drug development. Agents that have the potential to interfere with the metastatic cascade, interrupt autocrine and paracrine growth loops, differentiate tumors, or reverse drug resistance are now in preclinical development and early clinical trial. Appropriate and evolving animal model systems will be needed to discover the next generation of cancer drugs and bring them to clinical study. This chapter will discuss the history and future of cancer drug discovery and drug development with special emphasis on the role of animal models in the process.

THE ROLE OF ANIMAL MODELS

In Drug Discovery

Drug Screening. The idea that systemic drugs could treat, and possibly cure, systemic cancer is relatively new in medicine. In the mid 1940s, Gilman's treatment of lymphomas with alkylating agents at Yale and Farber's induction of short remissions in leukemia with antifolates at Harvard led the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to begin a major effort in cancer drug discovery and development. Stated in its simplest terms, the purpose of the initial NCI screen was to select and prioritize drugs for clinical trial (4-6, 17-23, 33, 38, 8, 113, 168, 169).

In 1955, murine leukemia models P388 and L1210 were selected as the initial system in which potential agents would need to demonstrate activity before further development. The reason for this selection was simple. Murine leukemia and lymphoma models were relatively inexpensive and allowed for a relatively high throughput of compounds. Indeed, from the inception of the mouse screen until its first modifications in the mid 1970s, more than 400,000 compounds passed through this screen.

At first, this mouse screening system was empiric. Over time, however, this empiricism became more enlightened with the development of the NCI Drug Information System. This computer-based inventory maintains the structure of each compound screened and its activity in murine model systems. This system has been used to limit the screening of analogues while turning greater attention to novel structures. Importantly, the Drug Information System also maintains discrete databases on compounds provided to NCI on a proprietary basis by pharmaceutical companies, allowing open access of the screen to industry.

From the beginning, however, it was obvious that this system had serious limitations. While most of the active drugs currently used in the treatment of leukemia and lymphoma were initially screened in the L1210 system, screening against rapidly growing leukemic cells could bias selection toward compounds that are preferentially active against rapidly growing tumors with essentially a 100% growth fraction. In fact, it was found that plateau phase cultures were less sensitive to cycle-specific agents than log phase culture, while some classes of clinically useful drugs, such as the alkylators, were active in plateau phase cell lines. The development of drugs active against the solid tumors of adulthood would presumably require a different approach.

The availability of new rodent models enabled the NCI to take further steps toward rational drug screening in 1975 (63). Instead of a single hurdle of activity in murine leukemia, compounds active in this system were subsequently tested against a panel that included transplantable murine tumor models designed to resemble common human solid tumors (including melanoma and lung, colon, and breast cancer) both in histology and cell kinetics. In a step that would presage later changes in the NCI screen, the availability of athymic (nude) mice also allowed the screening of drugs against transplantable human tumors as well (138, 162). Initially, these human tumor xenografts included lung, colon, and breast cancer (52, 97, 121).

Overall, these changes took the NCI screen from a com-

Table 56.1. Origin of DCT Prescreen and Tumor Panel Models

| Site tumor | Host of origin | Tumor of origin | Historical description | Site |
|------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|------|
| Prescreen | | | | |
| P388 leukemia | DBA/2 mouse | Chemically induced with 3-methyl-cholanthrene | Lymphocytic leukemia | IP |
| L1210 leukemia | DBA/2 mouse | Chemically induced with 3-methyl-cholanthrene in ethyl ether | Lymphoid leukemia | IP |
| Tumor Panel | | | | |
| Mouse tumors | | | | |
| B16 melanoma | C57BL/6 mouse | Spontaneous at base of ear | Melanoma | IP |
| CD8F mammary carcinoma | CD8F female mice | Spontaneous | Mammary adenocarcinoma | SC |
| Colon 38 | C57BL/6 mouse | Induced by 1,2-dimethylhydrazine | Colon carcinoma | SC |
| Lewis lung carcinoma | C57BL/6 mouse | Spontaneous in the lung | Carcinoma | IV |
| Human tumor xenografts | | | | |
| CX-1 colon | Isolated in tissue culture, subsequently maintained in nude mice | Human colon. Untreated primary tumor from 44-year old caucasian female | Adenocarcinoma of the colon | src |
| LX-1 lung | Isolated and maintained in nude mice | Metastatic lesion from arm of 48-year-old male with oat cell lung carcinoma treated with <i>Corynebacterium Parvum</i> , cyclophosphamide (Cytosan), and radiation. | Carcinoma | src |
| MX-1 mammary | Isolated and maintained in nude mice | Human breast. Primary tumor from 29-year-old female with no previous chemotherapy. CL-1 line | Carcinoma | src |

src, subrenal capsule; IP, intraperitoneal; IV, intravenous; SC, subcutaneous.

pound-oriented toward a more tumor-specific approach. However, the high cost of the transplantable mouse and human xenograft systems (approximately \$5,000 per compound) was unsuitable for high capacity screening. Instead, the NCI designed a two-stage system in which the murine leukemia model was maintained as a stage I "prescreen."

Compounds entering the system were first tested against a highly drug-sensitive mouse leukemia. Agents shown active against P388 or L1210 were then tested in a stage II screen against the solid tumor panel. Table 56.1 illustrates the animal tumor panel used in the screen. It includes both the transplantable murine tumor models and the human tumor xenografts. In turn, those agents with the broadest spectrum of activity against solid tumors received priority for phase I clinical trial (Fig. 56.1).

The rationale for this approach was simple. Earlier experience in the NCI murine leukemia-based screen had shown that L1210 and P388 were the most sensitive models for drugs that were subsequently shown to have clinical activity (138). In particular, P388 was more sensitive to compounds of the natural product class than L1210 (64, 148). Thus, most inactive compounds could be screened-out by an inexpensive, high capacity, highly sensitive, less specific prescreen before the presumably more rigorous development in the low capacity, less sensitive, more specific tumor panel. When in full operation, P388 screened some 15,000 compounds each year, of which 500 to 1,000 were advanced into the stage II (solid tumor) phase of testing.

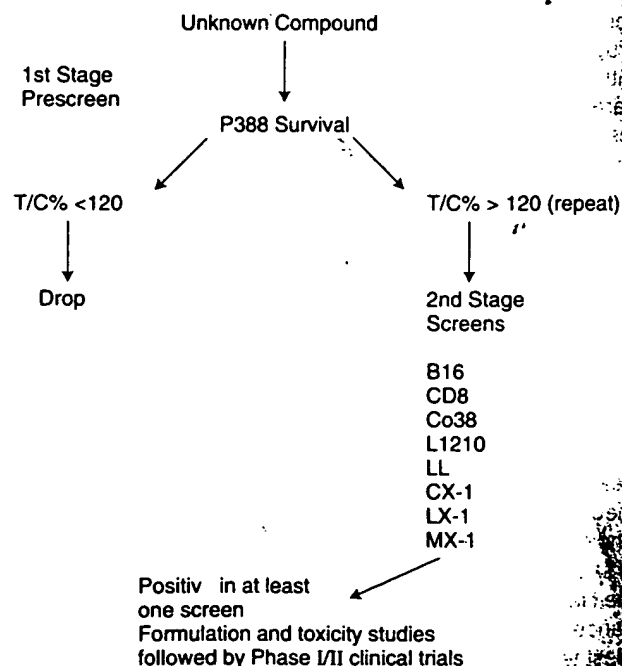


Figure 56.1. National Cancer Institute Drug Screening Strategy, 1975-1985.

While the approach appeared a reasonable compromise considering costs and logistics, the limitations remain obvious. The refined screen remained, at its heart, a compound-oriented strategy using a highly sensitive, rapidly dividing leukemia model for initial intake. However, the bias against selection of drugs specifically active in solid tumors remained. For example, fewer than 2% of all agents active against P388 showed significant effects in Lewis lung or colon (38) adenocarcinomas (91, 148).

Most disturbing was the failure of the disease-specific phase II component of the screen to predict for disease-specific clinical activity. Retrospective analysis of solid tumor activity in phase II trials was not predicted by parallel preclinical solid tumor activity. As will be discussed later, if a given drug demonstrated significant preclinical activity in xenograft models of human breast, colon, or lung cancer, this did not predict for clinical activity in patients with these diseases. In addition, the screen identified few active new leads (11, 30, 51, 163). Accepting the limitations of animal models of this type in cancer drug screening and recognizing the need for a preclinical screening system with greater predictive power, the NCI began to focus on a truly disease-oriented approach to drug discovery in the mid 1980s. Ideally, such a screen would be able to detect broadly active or disease-specific drugs.

Because of the high cost and a continued need for a high volume screen, animal models were determined to be impractical. Instead, the development, characterization, and maintenance of an entirely in vitro human tumor cell line screen was initiated (7, 8, 37, 103, 107, 141, 155). In 1985, the NCI screen evolved into its most recent configuration, an in vitro (stage I) screen followed by the more refined in vivo (stage II) screen (Fig. 56.2).

In stage I, agents are tested against a panel of approximately 60 cell lines representing the most common solid tumors of adulthood including lung, breast, colon, renal, and ovarian cancer (21, 23). Drug-resistant tumors are specifically included in the screen. These include the human breast carcinoma selected for multiple drug resistance (mdr) and P388 murine leukemia resistant to natural products, both of which potentially provide additional identification of new agents with particular activity against potentially resistant tumors (31, 71). In stage II, the most sensitive human tumors are tested against the same drug in nude mice. Activity in the nude mouse-human xenograft system in itself is sufficient for further preclinical development including toxicology and formulation, steps that are often the most costly process of drug development.

In summary, the current NCI approach to cancer drug discovery has evolved from a highly empiric compound oriented animal-based screen to a human in vitro panel. An advantage to this approach in addition to its disease orientation and adaptability to high volume screening is its flexibility with respect to natural product extracts. While animal models require relatively large quantities of relatively pure compounds for screening, the in vitro panel can actually be used to purify active compounds from small quantities of natural product extracts.

However, animal models will continue to play a critical role in cancer drug development. Preclinical activity of an antitu-

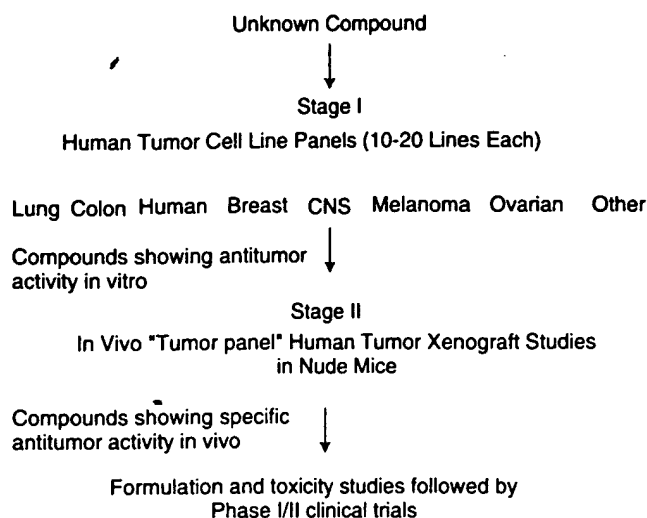


Figure 56.2. National Cancer Institute Drug Screening Strategy 1985-present.

mor agent in a relevant in vivo system is a *sine qua non* for clinical testing. As development of anticancer agents turns progressively toward agents that modify biological responses, differentiate tumors, and inhibit metastasis and invasion, animal models will become more important in the future. Immunostimulants and inhibitors of metastasis can only be studied preclinically in the appropriate animal model system.

ANIMAL TUMOR MODELS

The selection of the appropriate experimental model is critical to cancer drug discovery and development. The value of the model depends on its validity, selectivity, predictability, and reproducibility (33, 34, 168). In cancer drug development, the animal model is selected to demonstrate the cytotoxic effect of the drug or biological agent on the tumor passage in that model system.

There is no perfect tumor model for any human cancer. Nevertheless, in selecting the best model system, consideration should be given to the genetic stability and heterogeneity of the transplanted cell line, its immunogenicity within the host animal, and the appropriate biologic endpoint (local growth, metastasis, survival). For example, the KHT sarcoma is a tumor with high metastatic potential, making it a very suitable model for the evaluation of a combined modality treatment (164) or inhibitor of metastasis.

In general, animal tumor models can be divided into either spontaneous or artificially transplanted systems. Solid tumors are usually transplanted by the inoculation of cell suspensions by the subcutaneous (SC), intradermal (ID), intramuscular (IM), intraperitoneal (IP), or intravenous (IV) routes. Leukemia models are transplanted only by the SC, IV, or IP routes.

The spontaneous tumor models that are either idiopathic or arise following carcinogenic (28, 29) or viral exposure mimic the clinical situation most closely. Spontaneous tumors are usually measurable only late in their course. Their metastatic pattern is not uniform, and their response to therapy is generally poor. They also resemble human cancers in kinetics and antigenicity.

However, there are significant obstacles to the use of such model systems. For example, a relatively small percentage of animals may develop disease following exposure to carcinogen or virus, and the tumors may have a variable natural course. In addition, the inability to establish accurate staging makes these models quantitatively unsuitable for assessing therapeutic response to an agent given in a uniform fashion. Generally speaking, spontaneous tumor models have their greatest role in studying the biology of carcinogenesis. In the future, they may also be important in the development of chemopreventive or chemosuppressive drugs.

The models with the widest use in experimental therapeutics are the transplanted animal tumor models and the human tumor xenografts. These will be discussed in some detail below.

Transplantable Animal Tumor Models

Early passages of transplanted tumors resemble spontaneous cancer most closely. These early passages show significant heterogeneity in cell kinetics and histology (101, 151). Despite these limitations, such models have been used in drug screening. Because established transplantable tumor models are well characterized and reproducible, they have traditionally been the foundation of cancer drug development (108, 131, 132, 144). How good are they in predicting clinical activity?

Multiple studies have been undertaken to assess the ability of preclinical animal activity to predict antitumor response in man (11, 14, 89). Marsoni and co-workers evaluated the activity of all cytotoxic drugs introduced into phase II clinical trial by the NCI between 1970 and 1985 (99). Of the 75 drugs entered into clinical trial during this period, 24 showed some evidence for clinical activity. One interpretation of these data is that the screen is highly predictive for clinical activity. Approximately 30% of drugs taken to clinical trial showed some evidence of activity. However, 74% of the drugs were active against lymphoma and 35% were active against leukemia. Only minimal activity was observed against solid tumors including those represented in the phase II portion of the screen. Indeed, analysis showed a poor correlation between preclinical in vivo and clinical activity in the same tumors. One must conclude that either animal model systems using transplantable tumors do not predict for clinical activity or that the P388 prescreen effectively selected against compounds specifically active in human solid tumors. The new in vitro human cell line screen will be important in answering these questions, since the initial identification of activity is in a human solid tumor rather than a murine leukemia-lymphoma model system.

A range of methods can be used to evaluate drug effect on tumors in animal models. Tumor size and tumor weight or volume changes are simple and easily reproducible parameters. Morphologic changes and alterations in tumor immunogenicity or invasiveness are other markers of response (62).

In addition, many specific assays have been developed for the measurement of treatment effects on tumors. This section will discuss some assays that can be used to judge tumor response.

Excisional Clonogenic Assay. This assay has been used widely as a method to assess what fraction of cells in a tumor population retain proliferative capability after being exposed to a chemotherapeutic agent. This assay is based on the assumption that the proliferative or clonogenic potential of tumor cells reflects the in vivo tumorigenicity of the tumor stem cell (149, 152). Thus, colony number is assumed to be proportionate to the number of viable cells.

The assay itself is straightforward. Tumor-bearing animals are tested with the drug under evaluation. At 24 hours, the tumors are excised from treated and untreated animals. A cell suspension is prepared from every tumor. The proliferative capacity of the cells in each suspension is evaluated by either in vivo inoculation intravenously into test animals of a selected cell suspension dilution (76, 153), or by plating the cells in liquid or agar medium (26, 75, 133). If an animal model is used, colony count is then performed in specific tissues at necropsy. The lung, liver, and spleen are commonly used for this purpose. If the cells were plated in agar, a colony count is performed in the dish. Colony-forming efficiency (CE) of the inoculated cells is calculated to assess the efficacy of treatment in terms of cell survival.

$$CE = \frac{\text{number of tumor colonies counted}}{\text{number of tumor cells plated}}$$

The ratio of the CE treated to the CE control is called surviving fraction (SF).

$$SF = \frac{CE \text{ treated}}{CE \text{ control}}$$

SF is the best parameter for expressing cell survival results from the excisional biopsy (92, 154).

This assay has the advantage of placing the treated and untreated tumors in identical environments. It is also able to select a resistant population of cells within the tumor at a low drug dose. In addition, excising the tumor 24 hours after exposing the animal to the cytotoxic agent allows giving doses up to the transplant range, which has important implications for the selection of agents for bone marrow transplantation.

TD50 (Endpoint Dilution Assay). TD50 (74, 77, 93) is the tumor cell inoculum that produces tumor growth in 50% of inoculated animals or sites. It is a measurement of the number of cells required to produce tumors from inocula in vivo. The assay is based on the same principles as that of colony formation. A cell suspension is prepared from both treated and untreated animals, with ranges of dilutions for each tumor depending on the expected value of TD50. The suspension is inoculated into groups of test animals subcutaneously, intramuscularly or intradermally for solid tumors, and intraperitoneally or intravenously for leukemias. The percentage of tumor take versus cell number inoculated for each treatment is determined and compared to control animals to determine TD50 (49).

Tumor Growth Delay Assay. Cytotoxic treatment can slow tumor growth and delay disease progression. These effects are measured by the tumor growth delay assay (9, 10, 157). Tumor delay by definition is the time required for the treated tumor to reach a specific size minus the time for the untreated tumor to reach that certain size. This assay involves a very simple technique, little equipment, and can be

completed for many types of tumors before animals are lost to metastasis or disease progression. Unlike the survival time assay discussed later, this evaluation does not require death as an endpoint.

The correlation between the growth delay and the amount of cell kill varies with the growth rate of the tumor (10). Thus, when a treatment effect on tumors with different growth rates is assessed, a comparison of absolute growth delay between tumor models is misleading. Therefore, a specific growth delay (growth delay/doubling time of the tumor) reflects more accurately the differences in cell kill. Figure 56.3 illustrates the concept of specific growth delay.

Survival Time Assay. Another parameter that can be used to assess the effect of a drug on tumor in the animal model is the survival time. Survival time is an obvious endpoint, since it combines the sum total of interactions between tumor, drug, and host. Since drug toxicity and tumor growth both have independent effects on survival, a judgment can be made about therapeutic index. However, this approach cannot directly assess cell kill or time-dependent cytotoxicity.

The therapeutic efficacy can be assessed by determining the increase in survival as an effect of the escalating dose of the studied drug. As the dose of an active drug increases, the survival time increases because of increasing logarithmic tumor cell kill. Survival time reaches a maximum point as the toxic effect of the drug outweighs the therapeutic effect and survival times diminish (145). The maximum point of survival is called the optimal point (OP) or the maximum increase in life span (IL). The higher the OP the better the given intervention's therapeutic efficacy. This model also

helps in assessing the safety of certain drugs by measuring the therapeutic ratio (TR), that is, the ratio between the optimal dose and that dose that leads to a specific increase in survival time (e.g., IL 20, IL 40, and so on). Therefore, in comparing drugs with the same maximum survival (optimal point), the higher the therapeutic ratio, the safer the drug (145).

A common use of survival to assess drug efficacy or increase in life span is the *T/C* percent ratio. This is defined as the ratio of the survival time of treated animals to the survival time of control, expressed as a percentage. This parameter has been used by the NCI for decision making, setting specific criteria of activity before further development is undertaken. A *T/C* of >120 in the solid tumor panel has been used as the benchmark for clinical development (Fig. 56.1) (15, 16, 100, 122).

Animal Tumor Xenografts

Before the availability of athymic or nude mice, human tumors were xenografted in mice immunocompromised by irradiation, thymectomy, or steroids (32, 158, 159). The first nude mice arose spontaneously in a closed, but not inbred, colony of albino mice in a virus laboratory in Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow, Scotland (134) and were described by Isaacson and Cattanaach as lacking fur (84). The first xenograft in nude mice was performed by Rygaard and Povlsen in 1969 using a human colon adenocarcinoma (136).

Flanagan initially described the genetic component of immunodeficiency in this important model. He found that the mutant gene (*nu*, for nude) is present on chromosome 11, as

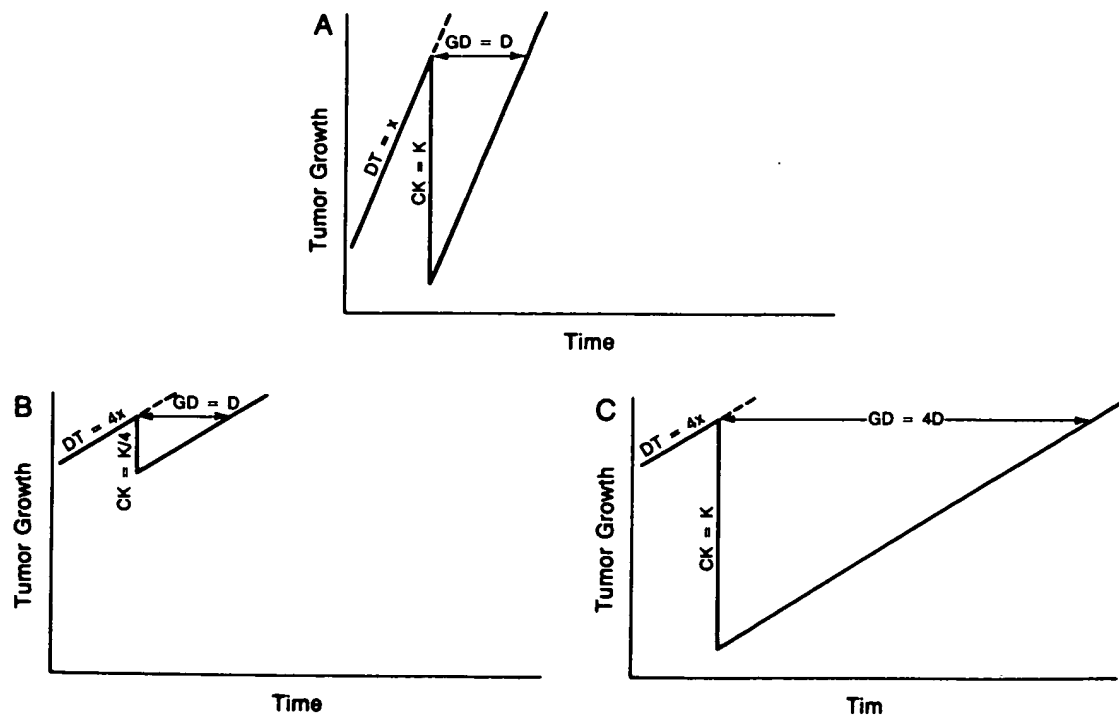


Figure 56.3. Tumor growth in relation to time before and after treatment (A). A 4-fold doubling time requires 1/4 of cell kill for the same growth delay (B). The same amount of cell kill results in 4-fold

increase in growth delay (C). DT, doubling time; CK, cell kill; GD, growth delay; K, relative cell kill; D, relative growth delay over time.

an autosomal recessive gene (50). It is responsible for the absence of hair in addition to other abnormalities including retarded growth, low fertility, and short life span (100% mortality within 25 weeks of birth and 45% mortality within 2 weeks of birth) (134). It was not until 1968 that Pantelouris noted that some of the nude mice lacked a thymus gland. These mice were found to have a homozygous mutation *nu/nu*, while both the phenotypically normal *+/+* and the heterozygous *nu/+* had a thymus (124). Immunologically, the *nu/nu* athymic mice have a small number of T cells that are residual after transplacental passage from heterozygous mothers. However, these T cells do not affect the rejection of tissue transplants (or other markers of T cell function) (129). These animals preserve B cell function (147) and exhibit a higher activity of natural killer cells (73, 80). These characteristics led to widespread use of nude mice in tissue transplantation and other areas of biomedical research (50, 53, 82, 118, 135, 137), including their use in human tumor transplantation.

The success of human tumor xenografting into the nude mice and the ability to maintain the histologic and biologic identity of tumors through successive passages *in vivo* revolutionized many aspects of cancer research, including drug development (83, 114, 128, 140). Transplantation of tumor cell lines into nude mice can be accomplished via multiple routes: subcutaneous, intraperitoneal (59), intravenous, intracranial (58), intrasplenic, renal subcapsular, or through a new orthotopic model by site-specific organ inoculation. Each site has specific advantages and limitations.

Subcutaneous implantation is the predominant site for transplantation of human tumor into the nude mouse because of its simplicity and easy access to tumor. Indeed, it provides the mainstay for *in vivo* testing of the drug discovery and screening program of the NCI (120).

A tumor cell suspension is usually injected into the flank of the animal. Depending on the clonogenic potential of the tumor, between 10⁶ and 10⁷ cells are required for successful engraftment. Tumors usually require between a few days to a few months to grow depending on the growth rate of the cell line used. Many human tumor xenografts have been established to date, including those from most of the solid tumors affecting adults. Human colon cancer and melanoma have been passaged for the longest time *in vivo*. Brain tumors have proven the most difficult to maintain (40, 47). Approximately one-half of the brain tumor cell lines have been successfully xenografted into athymic mice (40).

Of interest, subcutaneous xenografts metastasize infrequently and seldom invade adjacent tissues. This may be because of the retention of some host defenses, especially natural killer cell activity (73, 80). Thus, animal survival is not a feasible endpoint for assessing drug efficacy in nude mice, since large tumor burdens prior to death may be associated with discomfort. Instead, the growth delay or the clonogenic assay would be more appropriate in this model. However, it is possible to select primary tumors or perturb the host defense mechanisms to develop models that are locally invasive or metastatic. Metastasis can be enhanced with the depletion of NK cells by pretreating the mice with cyclophosphamide, beta estradiol, or other agents (44, 48, 94).

Human tumor cells undergo kinetic changes after trans-

plantation and passage in the nude mice. Most frequently, the transplanted tumor adapted to growth in animals has a shorter doubling time than the original tumor isolated from a patient (149). Growth rates increase further during subsequent passages (35, 150). The vascularity of the primary and transplanted tumor also differ with transplanted tumors showing better blood supply and less necrosis. This difference could be due to selection of the most rapidly growing cells from a heterogeneous primary animal, secretion of paracrine growth factors, which induce neovascularization, or simply tumor size.

Despite these changes in kinetics of invasive potential, the majority of the xenografted human tumors maintain the morphologic and biochemical characteristics of their original tumors. Therefore, it is expected that chemosensitivity would be similar in both the original and the xenografted human tumor, and that this correlation would predict for both active single agents and active drug combinations. In fact, excellent correlations can be made between average growth delay for human tumors in nude mice treated with the best available drug combinations and complete clinical response rates (46, 61). In increasing order of responsiveness, these correlations have been shown for human xenografts of non-small cell lung cancer (114, 142), colon cancer (119), breast cancer (60), small cell lung cancer (30), and malignant melanoma (51).

Renal Subcapsular Assay (RSC). Unlike the subcutaneous xenograft assay, the renal subcapsular assay has a relatively short and constant period between tumor inoculation and the appearance of a grossly palpable mass. Tumors can usually be assessed in a period of 6 days (3). Therefore, this model is particularly appropriate when a short term *in vivo* assay is required. Cells are inoculated as a tumor fragment, usually 1 mm in size, under the kidney capsule of the nude mouse, as first described by Bogden and colleagues in 1978 (15). These tumors maintain true morphologic, functional, and growth characteristics of the original tumor from which they were derived (2). For example, they preserve cell-cell contact, maintain the spatial relationship of the tumor, and form a more representative model of human metastasis than the subcutaneous xenograft. Therefore, tumor response can be subsequently assessed by measuring tumor size (growth assay), colony formation by surviving cells (the clonogenic assay), or simply animal survival (1, 14, 39, 42, 156).

While appealing in many ways, the renal subcapsular assay has limitations. The subcapsular area of the kidney is not a totally immunoprivileged site. When sectioned and examined microscopically, variable amounts of tumor mass represent invading lymphocytes (49, 98, 160). Thus, the immunogenicity of a given tumor in a given animal model is an important variable to control, and considerable controversy surrounds the use of this assay (1). However, as will be discussed later, it might be an ideal orthotopic model for renal cell carcinoma (see below) (111).

Intraperitoneal, Microencapsulated Tumor Assay

Because of the limitations of the renal subcapsular assay and its specific poor adaptability to slow-growing tumors,

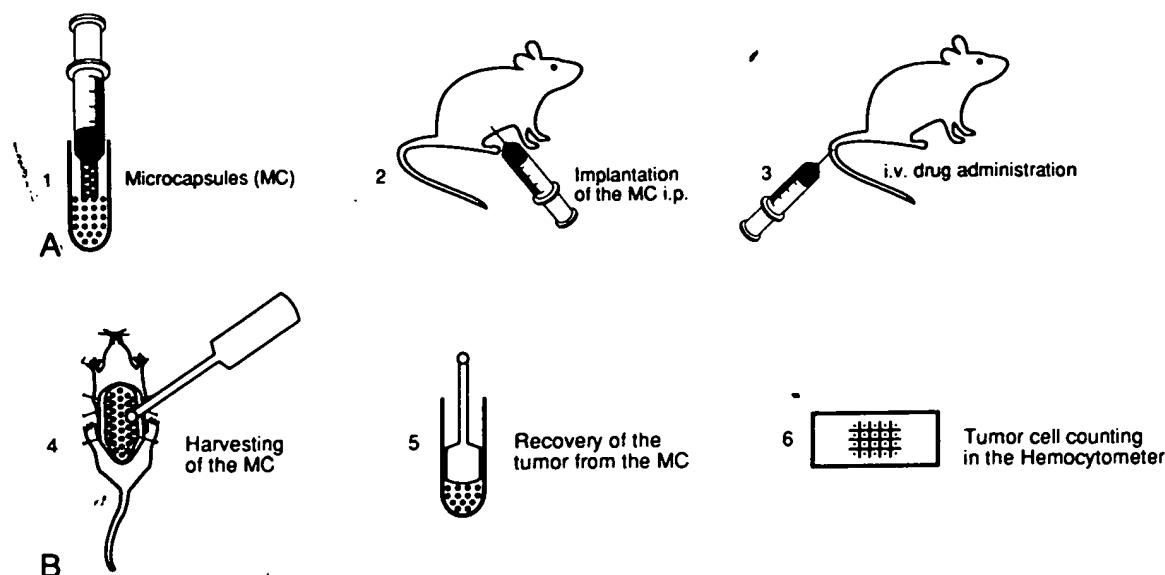


Figure 56.4. Intraperitoneal microencapsulated tumor assay.

Table 56.2. Orthotopic Models for Study of Human Cancers Grown in Athymic Nude Mice

| Human cancer organ site of origin | Implantation site in nude mice | Nomenclature |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Central nervous system | Percutaneous intracranial implantation into cerebral cortex | Intracranial model |
| Colon | Wall of cecum | Intracolonic model |
| Lung | Intrabronchially into right mainstem bronchus | Intrapulmonary model |
| | Percutaneously into right pleural space | Percutaneous intrathoracic model |
| Pancreas | Pancreas parenchyma | Intrapancreatic model |
| Renal | Subrenal capsule | Subrenal capsule model |
| | Kidney parenchyma | Intrarenal model |

12, 43), alternative short-term *in vivo* assays have been developed. One of the more interesting is the microencapsulated tumor assay which depends on microencapsulation technology. Tumor cells are encapsulated in semipermeable gels that can be formed into microcapsules of (0.05 to 1 mm) (90). These microcapsules can be inoculated into the peritoneal space of experimental animals. Under typical assay conditions using mice, approximately 600 microcapsules are injected into the peritoneum. The semi-permeability of the capsule protects the tumor cells from host cell-mediated immune cytotoxicity, so that athymic (nude) mice need not be used. At the same time, it allows nutrients and systemic cytotoxic agents to diffuse and reach the tumor cells. Anti-cancer effect is assessed by recovering microcapsules and counting viable tumor cells in treated versus control animals (Fig. 56.4) (67, 68).

The microencapsulation assay is simple, rapid, and relatively inexpensive. For a given analysis, it requires fewer mice when compared to the subcutaneous transplanted tumor assay (68). By definition, tumor cells are evaluated after exposure to drug concentrations that are obtainable *in vivo*. In addition, the system is adaptable to most solid tumors and, unlike the subcutaneous transplanted tumor assay, uses immunocompetent mice. For these reasons, the mi-

croencapsulated tumor assay is being evaluated by the NCI screening program as an *in vivo* second line screen to follow initial drug leads that pass the *in vitro* screening system previously described (20).

Orthotopic Xenograft Model. In 1889, after analyzing autopsies from patients with metastatic breast cancer, Paget concluded that metastasis is not a random phenomenon. Rather, he concluded the malignant cells have special affinity for growth in the environment of certain organs, the familiar seed and soil hypothesis (123). Certainly, there exist organ site-specific interactions that are essential for optimal growth and progression of cancer *in vivo* (77, 106, 117, 126, 127). The orthotopic xenograft model is a system in which tumor cells are implanted at the site of the organ of origin. This organ-specific site presumably provides the tumor cells with an optimal environment for growth and progression. Because of its relevant expense and novelty, this model has as yet not been used widely by the NCI drug screening program. However, it is being used extensively to explore its role as an *in vivo* evaluation model for cytotoxic agents specific for organ sites such as lung cancer.

Multiple tumor xenografts have already been developed using nude mice, including renal cell carcinoma (44, 45, 112), pancreatic carcinoma (136), certain brain tumors

(139), prostate, colon, and to a larger extent lung cancer (Table 56.2) (102). All of these models are potentially amenable to orthotopic development.

The lung tumor model is the predominant orthotopic model that has been explored by the NCI102 (105), and ap-

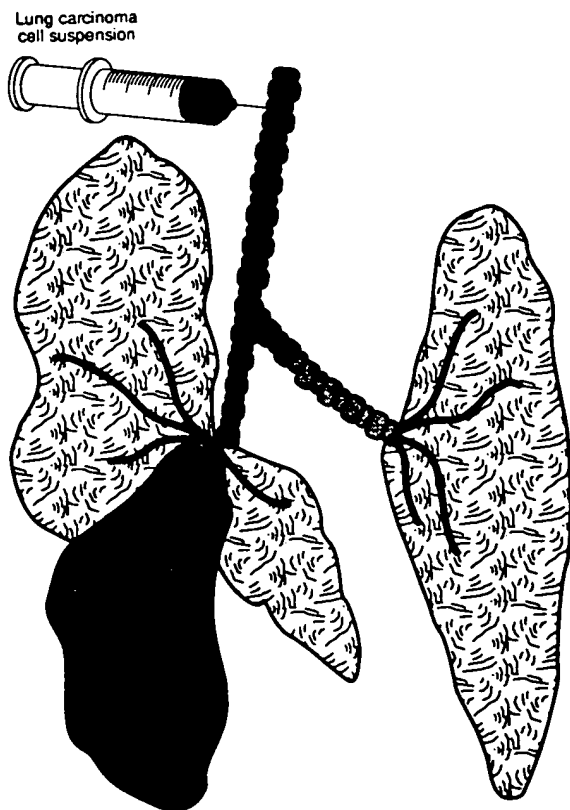


Figure 56.5. Orthotopic in vivo human lung cancer model in athymic nude mice. Intrabronchial tumor cell inoculations. Shaded area, tumor.

plication of other models is currently underway. In the case of lung cancer, tumor cells in suspension are inoculated through the right main stem bronchus into the right lung in a lightly anesthetized animal (Fig. 56.5). Tumor response can be evaluated by sacrificing the animal and histologically quantifying tumor growth, or as shown in Figure 56.6, non-invasive chest x-ray may be sufficient to provide interim evaluation of tumor response (104).

Another approach toward establishing a lung tumor orthotopic model is through percutaneous intrathoracic implantation (Fig. 56.7) (102). A disadvantage to this model is the finding that as many as 30% of the inoculated tumor grows outside the lung parenchyma, either in the pleural space or the chest wall. Tumor related mortality from the intrabronchial model is higher than that of intrathoracic implantation. Both orthotopic approaches have a much higher tumor mortality than the subcutaneous model of the same tumor cell line (102). The far greater aggressiveness of identical inoculates of lung cancer injected into the bronchus compared with subcutaneous injection is a reflection of Paget's early observation on tumor cell tissue tropism and suggests that orthotopic models may reflect the clinical situation most closely (69, 95, 110, 116).

Hollow Fiber Technology. Recently, the NCI has incorporated semipermeable hollow fiber assays into the in vivo phase of drug development. These hollow fibers allow tumor cells to grow in contact with each other, either in the log or stationary phases of cell growth (Fig. 56.8). The permeability of the fibers can be selected to limit the molecular weight of drug, which can penetrate into the tumor mass. A practical advantage of this system is that more than one tumor type can be implanted into a single animal, allowing more information to be obtained from a single in vivo experiment. In addition, the system may be adaptable to epithelial cells in an attempt to screen for compounds that interfere with angiogenesis. Because this is an in vivo system, the agent

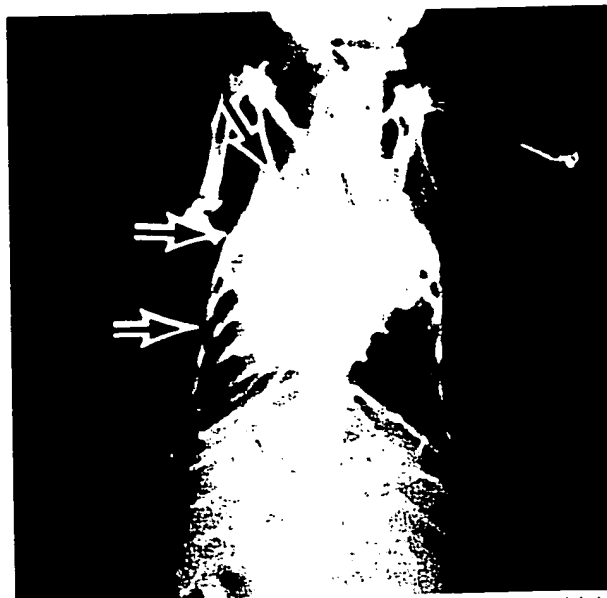


Figure 56.6. X-ray of a lung field of a normal athymic mouse (left) and an x-ray showing a right lung carcinoma resulted from intra-

bronchial inoculation of human lung cancer cell line (right). Arrows, tumor site.

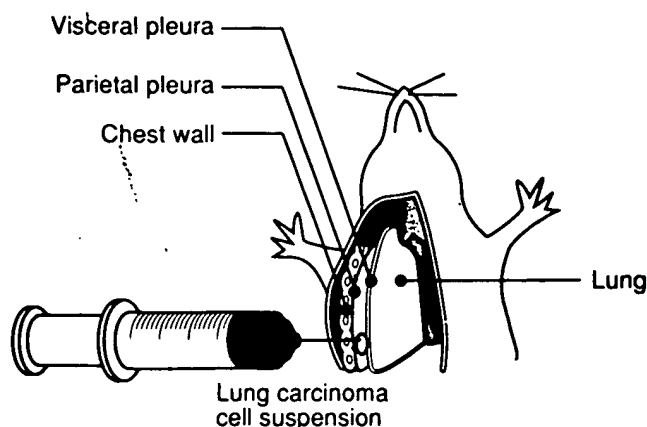


Figure 56.7. Orthotopic in vivo human lung cancer model in athymic nude mice. Percutaneous tumor cell inoculation.

must be bioavailable to show activity, correcting for the variables of serum protein binding and drug metabolism.

Another potential advantage of hollow fiber technology is that it allows the successful maintenance of allogeneic and xenogeneic cells in immunocompetent hosts, thereby decreasing the costs associated with in vivo drug development considerably.

As currently used in the NCI program, malignant cells derived from patients with breast, kidney, lung, ovary, colon, CNS, hematologic, and melanoma cancers are encapsulated in polyvinylidene fluoride hollow fibers, which exclude molecules with a molecular weight of 500,000 or greater (80A). The fibers are then implanted either subcutaneously or intraperitoneally, with each animal hosting six samples representing three tumor cell lines each, cultured both in the peritoneal and subcutaneous spaces. Already, this technique has shown promise with known active drugs, and hollow fiber technology is increasingly being adapted to the in vivo phase of cancer drug development.

Limitations of Animal Models

IMMUNOGENICITY

The development of immunogenicity to a transplantable tumor model can complicate interpretation of treatment results. The cell kill and animal survival can become exaggerated as a result of this potential for genetic drift over time. Therefore, periodic monitoring is important to quality assurance in maintaining a stable animal model with consistent predictability.

INFECTION

Several viral infections are difficult to control in laboratory animals and require constant vigilance. These infections not only cause a decrease in the reproductive capacity but also can limit the tolerance of the animal to both tumor inoculation and therapeutic interventions. Many effects of viral infection (wasting, cachexia, or growth retardation) can mimic the dose-limiting toxicities of anticancer drugs. The most common viruses that affect laboratory mice are the mouse hepatitis virus (MHV), the Sendai virus, and the pneumonia virus of the mouse (PVM).

MHV is a major cause of death among nude mice (41). Infection can be fatal and usually (55, 56) produces cachexia and necrotizing hepatitis. Infected mice may not tolerate drugs that require hepatic clearance or that are hepatotoxic in themselves.

The Sendai virus is a common murine respiratory virus. It causes a wasting syndrome and death in immunocompromised mice (13, 41, 166). It also causes pulmonary vein thrombosis, suppurative rhinitis, and otitis media. In addition, this virus can lead to squamous metaplasia of the lung that might cause confusion in assessing tumors in these animals (130). Subclinical infection of breeding colonies can occur with no apparent symptoms (56), and continuous monitoring of animals is essential. Like the Sendai virus, PVM can induce squamous cell changes in the bronchus similar to squamous cell cancer (115). Another virus that can affect

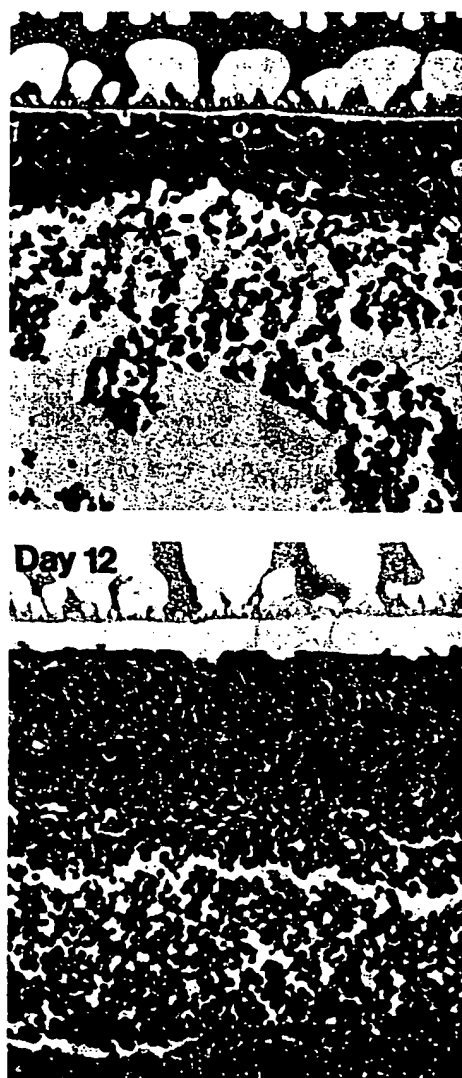


Figure 56.8. Human colon cancer cells grown in vivo in hollow fibers. Day 8 log phase growth. Day 12 stationary growth at confluence. Note central necrotic cells in the confluent tumor.

athymic mice is the mouse leukemia virus that can cause erythroleukemia. Reovirus, polyomavirus, and ectomelia are other pathogens that can affect lab animals.

Because of the high susceptibility of the nude mice for infection, strict isolation and exclusion of infected animals from experiments is essential. In addition, microbiologic monitoring is important to maintain any reproducible experimental animal model system. Microbiologic monitoring includes routine viral isolation and serologic studies on the breeding colonies.

Other Animal Models

TRANSGENIC AND CHIMERIC MICE

The transgenic mouse is the resultant progeny of the pronucleus of a fertilized egg that is injected with a foreign gene. This progeny then carries and expresses this exogenous gene and passes it on in a Mendelian fashion to its descendants (25). Genes can be transferred to the pronucleus

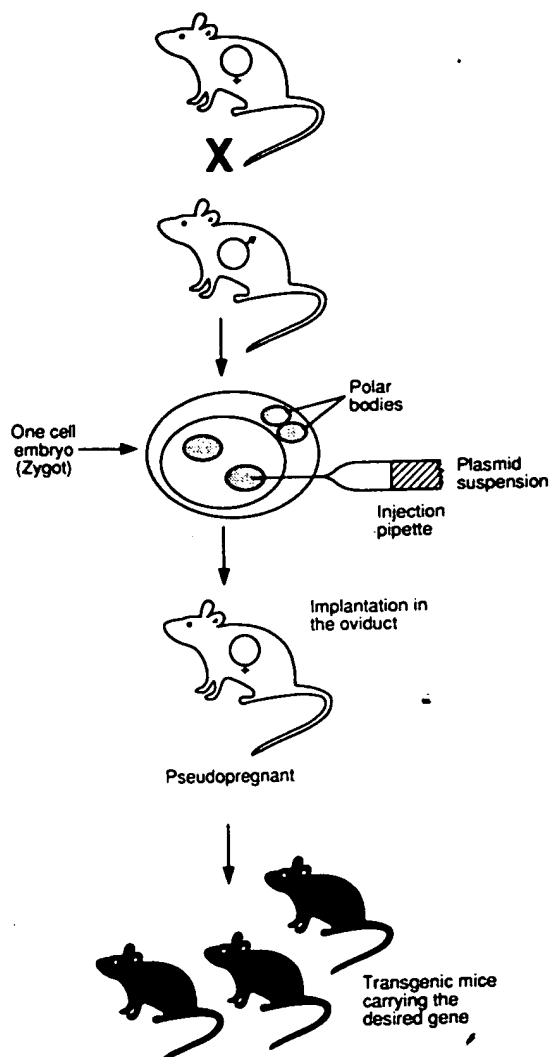


Figure 56.9. Transgenic mice production by pronuclear microinjection.

by microinjection (24, 66, 79, 85), retroviral infection (86–88, 146), or embryonic stem cell (ESC) transfer (Fig. 56.9) (36, 81, 96). By far, the most efficient of these three strategies is microinjection. ESC provides a means to manipulate and select cells containing the transferred gene in culture prior to insertion into animals. This is accomplished by transferring the gene into ES cells, which are then transplanted into the blastocyst to create a chimeric mouse. If reproductive tissues derived from the embryonic stem cell contribute to the germ line, a transgenic mouse is established from the progeny of the chimeric animals (Fig. 56.10) (65).

The ability to integrate a gene of interest into the genome of an animal, which then expresses it, provides a novel approach for cancer investigation. Tumorigenesis can be studied through a better understanding of interactions between regulation of expressed cellular and viral oncogenes (21). Transgenic mice are excellent models for studying the consequences of oncogene expression in animals, the effect of oncogenes on growth and differentiation, and their potential for cellular transformation. These mice also provide an *in vivo* preclinical model for gene therapy and gene transfer.

An example of how this technique can be applied to drug development is the recent introduction of drug resistance

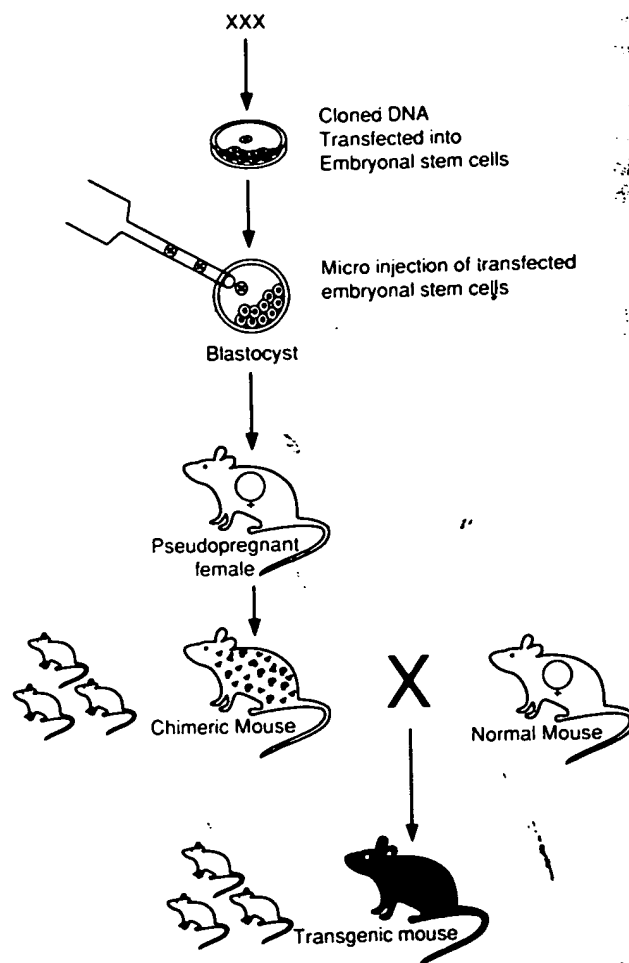


Figure 56.10. Chimeric transgenic mice derived from transfected embryonic stem cell-mediated transfer.

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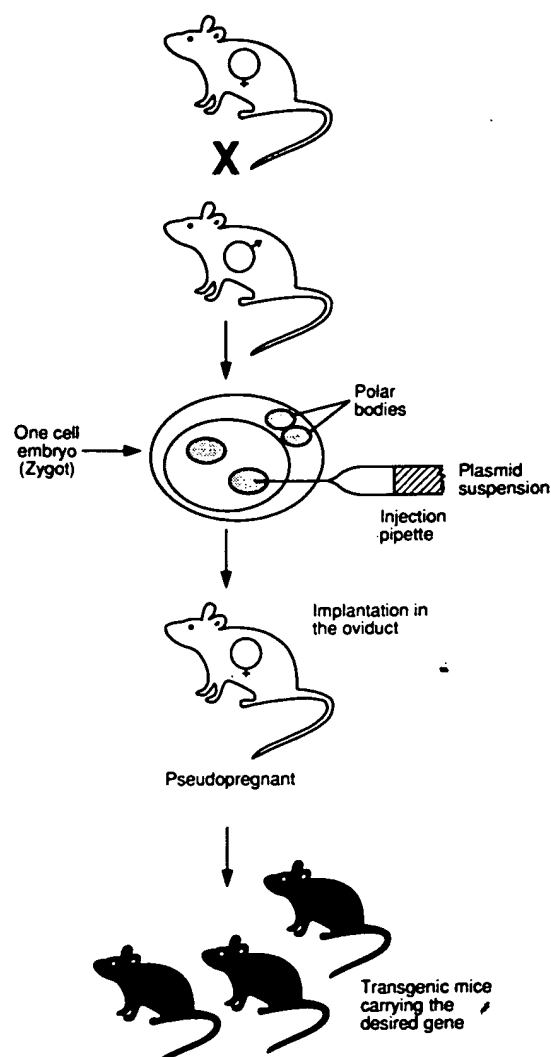


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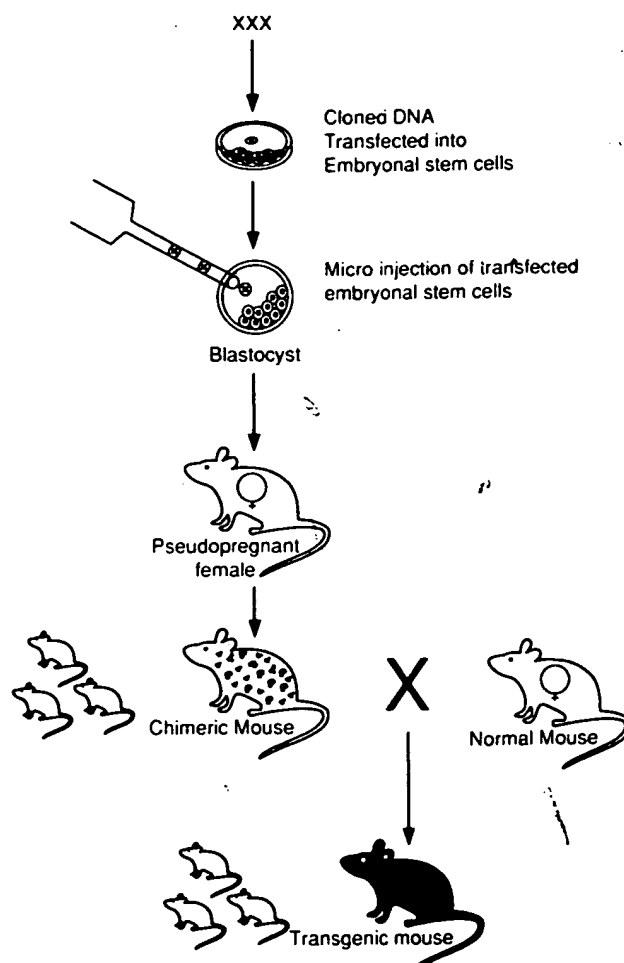


Figure 56.10. Chimeric transgenic mice derived from transfected embryonal stem cell-mediated transfer.

genes into transgenic animals. These genes include the multiple drug resistance (or *mdr* gene), which confers resistance to a variety of important drugs of the natural product class including VP-16, Adriamycin, and the vinca alkaloids (20).

Because normal cells from transgenic mice transfected with the *mdr* gene express the same surface glycoprotein that confers drug resistance to tumor cells, they are able to tolerate normally lethal doses of anticancer drugs of the natural product class with toxicity. Such animal models may have unique roles in cancer drug development (57, 109). For example, they could be used, in an *in vivo* system, to screen or further evaluate drugs capable of reversing the resistance phenotype.

ANIMAL MODELS IN CANCER DRUG DEVELOPMENT

The previous section of this chapter has reviewed the role of animal models in cancer drug discovery. Following identification of a compound of interest, animal models continue to be important to the process of cancer drug development, specifically in the area of preclinical toxicology. These studies are done with a 2-fold purpose: 1) to estimate a safe starting dose for phase I clinical trials in man and 2) to predict acute and chronic toxicities in a relevant preclinical animal model. The role of the animal model has evolved in this area as well.

In the 1970s, the NCI used only dogs and monkeys in its preclinical toxicology protocols. Lethal and nonlethal doses were established in both models and chronic toxicity studies undertaken only in dogs. Starting doses for patient studies were calculated as one-third of the lowest toxic dose for the most sensitive animal model, monkey or dog (70).

In 1979, the NCI and the Food and Drug Administration reviewed existing data and agreed that toxicity studies performed largely in mice could safely replace the more costly and time-consuming large animal studies in dog and monkey models.

Currently, the LD10 (the dose of drug lethal to 10% of animals) in mice is tested in a dog model using an MELD10 or mouse equivalent LD10. This dose can be estimated from a conversion equation:

$$\text{dose (in mg/m}^2\text{) in dogs} = \frac{K_m \text{ dog}}{K_m \text{ mouse}} \times \text{dose (in mg/m}^2\text{) in mouse}$$

where K_m is the surface area to weight ratio in each species (54). This is an important equation for dose conversion between species for cancer drug development (Table 56.3). In the absence of severe toxicity in dogs, phase I trials in humans may begin at one-tenth the LD10 in mice. Of course, if severe toxicity is observed in dogs at the mouse LD10, doses are de-escalated to determine the minimally toxic dose in dogs. Clinical studies may then begin at one-third of this dose derived in dogs. Overall, the new NCI toxicology protocol has performed well in predicting safe initial doses for clinical trials, while reducing the reliance on and cost of preclinical large animal toxicology.

A new use of animals in preclinical drug development beyond simple prediction of toxicity has recently gained mo-

Table 56.3. Surface Area to Weight Ratios (K_m) of Various Species

| Species | Body weight (kg) | Surface area | Surface area to weight ratio (K_m) |
|---------|---------------------|--------------|--|
| Mouse | 0.02 | 0.0066 | 3.0 |
| Rat | 0.15 | 0.025 | 5.9 |
| Monkey | 3 | 0.24 | 12 |
| Dog | 8 | 0.40 | 20 |
| Human | | | |
| Child | 20 | 0.80 | 25 |
| Adult | 60 | 1.6 | 37 |

mentum. This is the use of preclinical pharmacology to guide dose escalation during the conduct of phase I clinical trials. As Collins and co-workers note in a recent excellent review of this concept (27), the rationale for pharmacologically guided dose escalation derives from the simple assumption that similar toxicities will occur at similar drug levels in mice and man. Since both toxicity and efficacy of anticancer drugs is related to total drug exposure, the area under the pharmacokinetic curve (AUC) has been proposed for this purpose.

In essence, the AUC is measured in mice following treatment with a given drug at the LD10 dose. This is compared with the AUC in patients entering the first dose of the phase I study, which, as previously discussed, is usually one-tenth the mouse LD10. If the AUC in man is significantly lower than that observed at the LD10 in mice, dose escalation can be accelerated beyond the standard Fibonacci schema. The speed with which dose can be escalated depends upon the therapeutic index of a given agent, but two escalation schemas have been proposed. The first, a geometric mean approach, uses a dose escalation factor equal to the square root of the ratio of the AUC at the mouse LD10 to the AUC in man at the entry dose level. The second schema continues to double doses at each escalation until the AUC in man approaches that seen in the mouse at the LD10. Drug levels would continue to be monitored in all patients on study to be certain that non-linear kinetics would not cause unexpected toxicities.

This hypothesis, of course, assumes that drug metabolism and end organ sensitivity to both parent drug and metabolites are similar in mouse and man. As Collins and others have convincingly demonstrated, these assumptions generally are true so that this approach could potentially save significant time in clinical drug development. In fact, pharmacologically directed dose escalation has been successfully used to accelerate dose escalation in a number of anticancer drugs in phase I clinical trials, including HMBA, merbarone, piraraxantrone, and idoxorubicin.

Conclusions

The use of animals in cancer drug discovery and development has evolved to become both more sophisticated and efficient over the past four decades. Despite contempo-

rary interests and pressure to decrease animal use in research, it is likely that animal models will play an increasingly important role in both cancer drug discovery and development.

To be sure, it is likely that the broad-based in vivo mouse screen using sensitive murine tumor cell lines, and which required several million mice during each year of operation, has been supplanted by more targeted screening systems that no longer require an in vivo model. The current NCI human tumor cell line screen has the theoretic advantage of being able to identify compounds specifically active in a given tumor type (e.g., breast, colon, lung) or histology (e.g. adenocarcinoma or squamous cell cancer). In addition, the assay conditions of the screen will hopefully allow the identification and characterization of new natural products from novel sources.

There are other screening models that require neither animals nor living cells. These screens select biochemical targets that can be purified and then inhibited as part of a screen. Examples include the P170 glycoprotein (screening for compounds that displace active drugs from the binding site, and that could reverse the multiple drug resistance phenotype), inhibitors of DNA topoisomerases or drugs that bind to specific growth factor receptors.

While these new screening systems are now possible because of a better understanding of the biology and growth requirements of cancer cells, they do not supplant animals entirely. Once a screen of any kind has identified an interesting lead, intermediate steps requiring animals will still be required prior to clinical trials in man.

These studies at a minimum include confirming activity against a given tumor in a relevant animal model, growth delay or improved survival in nude mice, inhibition of orthotopic tumor growth, or significant cell kill in the microencapsulation model. The animal model is critical in taking the screen one step closer to the clinic. It confirms that the drug and/or its metabolites reach their target and demonstrate a positive and reproducible therapeutic effect.

While this chapter has focused on cancer drug discovery and development, animal models have a special role in the development of biologic agents. Here the relevant biologic endpoints may not cross species. For example, G-CSF does not affect bone marrow function in mice, while GM-CSF treatment induces a profound leucocytosis in mice. These agents may require animal models closer to man (non-human primates) or other systems, such as the SCID (severe combined immunodeficiency) mouse model, in which the human immune system can be selectively introduced and the effects of biological agents monitored in a controlled, yet essentially human, milieu.

Just as the role of animals in cancer drug discovery has become more refined over time, so too has their role in drug development. The general convertibility of doses between species has decreased the need for larger animals (non-human primates and dogs) during preclinical toxicology. The incorporation of pharmacokinetics into preclinical toxicology has become routine and is appealing for a number of reasons. Such studies provide insights into drug metabolism as it relates to end organ toxicity and can determine whether saturable (non-linear) kinetics contribute to the therapeutic index. Perhaps most interesting is the recent successful ap-

plication of pharmacologically directed dose escalation to phase I studies in man and the refinement that this approach will give to what has been a largely empiric area of clinical research.

Appropriate use of animal models is essential to the successful, efficient and safe discovery and development of new treatments for patients with cancer. The lessons learned will hopefully have a positive influence on the development of new therapies for other diseases as well.

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